

COMFORT FROM CHRIST'S OMNISCIENCE

NO. 2669

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”
John 21:17

PETER was somewhat hardly pressed. He felt that he was pushed into a corner, and compelled to look into his own heart, and divulge its innermost secret. To be asked once, in the presence of his brethren, whether he loved his Lord more than they did, had a tendency to humiliate him, for he had boastfully declared that, though all men should be offended because of Christ, he would not.

But to be asked next, whether he really loved Christ at all, sank him to the ground with holy shame, and when his Master asked him, the third time, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” Peter was grieved—not angry—that could not be his condition under such circumstances, nor was he rebellious, but at last, his heart was effectually touched by his Master’s skillful hand, and he was grieved, just as true love is always grieved when it is questioned, but most of all grieved when it is questioned again, and again, and again.

Now, the enormity of his guilt in denying his Lord has come home to him, and the grief which he had caused his gracious Master is now reflected in his own deep and contrite sorrow, “Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?”

Our Savior’s thus pressing him closely was no doubt necessary as a salutary discipline to Peter. It was not unkindness, but the highest form of honest tenderness which led our Lord to act in this way. I suppose that, if such a thing had occurred in any one of our churches as for some leading member to deny that he knew Christ, and to go the length of denying it with oaths and curses, and to commit that great sin three times in the presence of many witnesses, so that the fact could not possibly be doubted, it would have been absolutely necessary, according to the teaching of the New Testament, to exercise discipline upon such a man, and I think that he must have been excluded from church fellowship.

The apostle Paul, writing concerning one who had been guilty of gross sin, says that, with such a man, we can have no fellowship—no, not so much as to eat with him, and he would have said the same about Peter. He had denied Christ with oaths and curses, it was a most heinous sin, and surely the purity of the church would be put in jeopardy—the very existence of the church as a testimony for Christ would be hazarded—by the retaining of such a man in its communion.

According to such a rule as that, I suppose we must always judge. But the Lord Jesus Christ possessed attributes which we have not, He was omniscient, and therefore He could read Peter’s heart. It was not necessary for Him to do what it might be lawful and even needful for us to do. He knew that Peter’s heart was right notwithstanding all the evil of which he had been guilty. So, instead of refusing to have fellowship with him, the Savior first eats with him—Christ literally bids him come to breakfast, and then He exercises what I may call a sort of church discipline upon him, though I mean that expression in no hard or unkind sense.

Paul wrote to Timothy, “Then that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear,” and our Lord acted in that manner on this occasion. The six other brethren, who might fitly be regarded as representing the entire church, were present, and the Savior began gently, but firmly, to probe Peter’s heart, and to probe it again, and yet again, until He perceived that He had touched him in the tenderest possible place, and had drawn from him this last and most solemn declaration of the sincerity of his

love, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Thrice had he denied his Lord, it was meet therefore, that he should thrice confess his love, and so his Master constrained him to do by His thrice repeated question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

Let us, dear friends, as we think over this sad incident of Peter's sin, and of our Lord's gracious way of restoring him to his former office by a gentle act of discipline, put ourselves through a little heart searching. It may be that, thanks to the restraining grace of God, we have not sinned as Peter did, but we have sinned in some other way. We have all of us sinned quite enough to make us say, "Lord, do we love Thee?" Instead of waiting for Him to put the question to us, we will ask it of ourselves—Do we really and truly love the Lord? Let us also believe that our Lord, as He stands at this moment among us, and walks from pew to pew, bows His head over each one of us and asks, "Lovest thou me?"

As He does so, let us not evade the question, or play tricks with it. Let not, any one of us say, "I hope I do," or "I am afraid I do not." We either do or we do not, and the only answer that will be satisfactory will be "Yes," or "No." If we say, "No," it will be so far satisfactory that we are speaking the truth, and possibly, we may be helped to start back from so terrible a truth as that we do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, and that will be good for us, especially if it shall lead us to yield to Him.

A man should always know the consequences of what he is doing, that he may do it with his eyes open, and then perhaps, he will see the folly and the sin of it, and take to a better course. But if, dear friend, you can answer, "Yes," to Christ's question, then do say it. Slowly, thoughtfully, as in the presence of the Eternal God, say, "Lord, I ask You to bear witness on my account, for Your word is faithful and true. 'Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'"

If you can say that, it will be a happy thing for yourself, and it will be a blessed thing for those who are round you, for now, being assured of your own love to Christ, you will endeavor to win others to share that love, that many of you together may be able to say to Christ—

*"Yes, we love Thee, and adore;
Oh, for grace to love Thee more!"*

Now, coming to the text, I am going to try to do two things—first to *examine Peter's reply*, and then, secondly, to *invite you to examine yourselves to see whether you can each give the same reply*.

I. First, let us EXAMINE PETER'S REPLY, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

I begin with the observation that it is quite clear from his reply, that *Peter was no Unitarian*. He had no doubts about the divinity of Christ, for he said to Him, "Lord, thou knowest all things." Now, there is no being conceivable as knowing all things except God, and if it is true that Jesus Christ knows all things, then He possesses that omniscience which is one of the essential attributes of deity.

I find that nowadays, there is a sad increase of that pestilent heresy which is practically a return to the old Arianism which sought to rob Christ of His true glory, and reduce Him to the level of a mere man. We, at any rate, are not tainted with that fatal error, God grant that we never may be! No, He who, as man, is our brother, is also God, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whom we worship and adore, and we think and speak of Him as possessing every attribute that is essential to the deity, and therefore, as possessing this one—that He knows all things. He searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men, for He is, assuredly, "very God of very God," or as Paul says, in his epistle to the Romans, He "is over all, God blessed for ever."

My next remark upon our text is, that Peter's mention of omniscience in connection with Christ, and in connection with our declaration of love to Him, may be regarded as *a fact very full of awe*, because the Christ with whom we have to deal knows everything of which we are thinking, He reads all that is in the very core and center of our soul, we are in the presence of One whose infinite knowledge takes in at one glance, the whole of our lives, past, present, and future.

My dear friends, if we recollect that fact, it becomes a very solemn thing for us to make an appeal to Him to bear witness that we do really love Him. Peter said to Christ, "Lord, thou knowest all things," which in his case meant, "Lord Thou knowest that, when the damsel said to me, 'Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee,' I denied it and said, 'I know not what thou sayest,' and when another maiden said, 'This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth,' I denied with an oath and said, 'I do not know the man,' and then, as if to settle the matter once for all, and make my accusers believe that I could not be one of Your followers, I took to profane swearing, and with oaths and curses, like any son of Belial or lewd fellow of the streets, I did blaspheme and swear."

Yes, the Master had read the inner thoughts of Peter, as well as heard his words. Jesus knew all about how mean and cowardly he was to be afraid of a couple of silly maids, and of those who stood with the throng in the high priest's palace, yet Peter says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

As we think of poor Peter, and his answer to Christ's question, let us recollect that Jesus also knows everything that we have done since we were converted as well as before—all those times in which our thoughts have been impure and unclean, or our desires have wandered beyond the bounds of that which is right and proper, or our temper has been hasty and hot, or our spirit has been angry and proud. He sees the whole of our life in a single instant, God's mind does not need a certain space of time to think of one wrong thing which we have done, and then afterwards, to think of another, but it is all present before His eye at the same moment. As when a man rises in a balloon above London, and sees it all at once spread before him, so God, from His throne on high, sees our whole life at one glance.

Just think of His pure and holy eyes seeing every portion of all your lives—your life at the table, your life in the parlor, your life in the kitchen, your life at your work, your life in the bedchamber, your life everywhere—and as you think of all that being under His immediate gaze, I think it must become a very solemn thing for you to say to Him, "Lord, Thou knowest all this, and yet I dare call Thee to witness that I do love Thee notwithstanding all that Thou hast seen."

Brothers and sisters, it is not by any means a trifling matter if our Lord only knows the sin of last week. Will you just think for a minute what it has been? Perhaps some of you may have grievously wronged the Savior during the week. If so, and remembering that He knows it all, can you yet creep up to Him and say, "Lord, though I am fully conscious that Thou knowest all that has happened, yet for all that, I do say, Thou also knowest that I love Thee." That is a fact full of awe.

It is, in the next place, *a fact which suggests to us that we should be very sincere*, for if the Lord knows all things, then anything like an attempt to profess a love which we do not possess is utterly foolish, for God will search it through and through, and discover its falseness. Then, in addition to being very foolish, it must be very wicked and insulting to the Lord. To tell another human being, whom you do not love, that you love him, would be a most cruel thing to do, and a most impudent and impertinent thing also, but voluntarily to express to God an affection which you do not feel, is a very near approach to blasphemy. If it be not blasphemy in words, it certainly is in thought and intent.

God knows, friend, whether, when you joined the church, you were indeed a follower of Christ. That night, when you were baptized, He saw all that was done, and He knew exactly whether it was to you only an outward form, or whether you were really in a spiritual sense, dead and buried with Christ. And when this service is over, it will be vain and futile for you to come to the communion table, and eat the bread, and drink of the cup, unless in your very soul you are trusting Christ, and believing in Him unto salvation. If you are determined to deceive someone, deceive your equal, play tricks with your fellow creatures, but never think to deceive the Most High, who sees through you as if you were made of crystal, and at this moment is watching each beat of your heart, and reading not only what is on your tongue, but what is in your mind, and will come forth from your lips by and by.

Oh, let us never, in our testimony, talk beyond our own line, or boast of virtues which we never possessed, and in our prayers, let us never pray as if we had an experience which we have never felt, but

let us say to Jesus, "Lord, thou knowest all things," and let us be intensely sincere before Him, and it shall be a blessed thing if, being so, we then dare to say, "yet thou knowest that I love thee."

Further, dear friends, this is a fact which not only fills us with awe and suggests to us sincerity, but it is *a fact which inspires us with hope*. At times, the grace that is really in us is scarcely visible to ourselves. I have often rejoiced that God's omniscience has enabled Him to spy out grace in me which I could not see, and I feel sure that there must be some of you who sometimes are led to question whether there is any grace in you or not. You ask, "Where is that grain of mustard seed?"

Fie on you! Fie on you! You ought to have watered it till it grew into a tree. But remember that even when you cannot see the grace that is in you, God can. When you are brought into such a state of diffidence and despondency that you are half afraid there is not any real love to Christ in your soul at all, yet if it be there, He can see it, for He put it there, and He values it very highly, and has a quick eye to spy it out.

"Lord, Thou knowest all things, therefore, I do bless You that You know every place where I have been, and You know my secret love passages with You." That is a blessed thought. I have no doubt that, when Peter said to Christ, "Thou knowest all things," he not only recollects his sin, but he recollects his going out and weeping bitterly, and he also recollects that look that Jesus gave him—such a look as you and I could not give to anyone.

I do not know what Peter said to the Lord while he was weeping bitterly, but there must have been many a sigh, and many a groan, and many a tear, in that time of anguish. Peter no doubt got away into a corner all alone, and he was ready to cover himself with sackcloth and ashes, as he there groaned, and wrestled, and cried. He did not know what to do with himself; and while he was thus praying, perhaps his Lord let in the light of the Gospel, and made him recollect some such promise as this, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy," and Peter had some comfortable gleams of hope even amid the darkness, and after a while, he did even dare to speak to his Lord, and tell Him how he loved Him.

And now Peter says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," for between You and me there has been some love passages which nobody knows but Yourself and myself. My eyes all full of tears have met Your eyes all full of love, and my heart all breaking has touched Your heart which was pierced upon the tree. Your wounded hand has been laid to my sore, and Your weeping eyes have looked my tears away. You know, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'"

So, dear friends, you see that there is something exceedingly sweet about that omniscience which has read the secret motions of our spirit towards the Lord. Even when they have been so feeble that we could scarcely see them ourselves, God has seen them.

And do you not think, dear friends, that there is something very blessed in Peter's plan of bringing in Christ's omniscience to answer his Lord's question about his love, inasmuch as *it meets our inability to speak?* Some of us can speak fast enough, but others have the holy gift of silence, which is a great blessing. They cannot say much, but they can look up to their Savior, and say, "Lord, You know all things, You know that we love You."

I have heard of a young Christian woman, who was asked to tell before the church the story of her experience, but she could not utter a word, till just as she was going out of the room, she turned around, and said, "I cannot speak for Jesus Christ, but I could die for Him." Then the one, who was in charge of the meeting, said to her, "Come back, dear sister, you have said quite enough for us to know that you love the Lord."

No doubt there are many who find it easier to live for Christ than to speak for Him, they have not that gift. Let me remind you who must always be the silent members of the church, that you may be blessed in your silence by reflecting upon this fact, that God knows all about what you cannot explain to your fellow Christians. His omniscience sets aside the necessity of your being able to express your love fluently, and you also can say, "Lord, You know all things, You know that we love You."

And is not this fact *a sweet encouragement to any of you who are persecuted for Christ's sake?* Our enemies do not burn us now, or stretch us on racks, but they still have many methods of showing their malice. They know how to torture us, and some of them are very ingenious in the art of tormenting. I have known some say—ungodly parents will say it to their daughters—sometimes wicked men will say it to their gracious wives—“You know very well that all your idea about being religious is that you want to be singular. You go to your place of worship because you like to be different from everybody else, that is the only reason you have.” Possibly, you do not know what to say to them, but you can always say this to your Savior, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”

Then again, if there is some little fault to be found with you in the family, down they come upon you, crying, “Ah! that is your Christianity, is it? You are one of those who have professed to be religious, and joined the church!” Mark you, friends, they will do a hundred times worse things themselves, and think nothing of it, but if they can catch you tripping in the slightest degree, they magnify your little slip into a grievous fall.

Now, it would be quite fair for them to do so if you set up to be perfect, but as you never did that, it is an unfair thing to charge you with insincerity because of imperfection. Do not let them have the opportunity of saying even that, if you can help it, yet sometimes, when you have given them no occasion for finding fault with you, they will make one, and invent an accusation for which there is no foundation. Well, if they do so, never mind, let them say what they will, but lift up your eyes to heaven and say, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”

A man of God—as upright a Christian man as I know—came to me not long ago, in great trouble because somebody had said that he had been drunk. He was dreadfully cut up about it, for he had been a teetotaler for many years, and nothing of the kind had occurred. “Well,” I said, “you are only tarred with the same brush as others of us,” and then I added, “As for me, I have had all manner of false and cruel things said about me! I recollect that an influential daily paper said of me, at the time of the Surrey Gardens accident, ‘We would place, in the hand of every right thinking man, a whip to scourge from society such a ranting charlatan.’ Yet I am here still, notwithstanding all that was said.

Moreover, when most abused, I used to go to bed at the same hour as I should have done if they had not slandered me, and I believe that I ate my dinner with as hearty an appetite as if everybody had been praising me.” One gets by degrees into such a condition that it does not matter what people say. And after all, does it ever really matter what they say? Let them throw mud at you till you are covered with it from head to foot, the kind of mud they fling has a tendency to come off when it is dry, and to make the garment that it once sullied look even brighter than it was before.

Do not fret yourselves about these slanderers and persecutors, but just get alone, and say to the Lord, ““Thou knowest all things.’ They do not, and it is a good thing for us that they do not. If they did, then they might find plenty of fault with us, and find some real faults in us, but they do not know everything, and they generally hit on the very thing of which we are quite innocent, but ‘Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee.’”

This seems to me to be a blessed text for you to take home and to carry with you wherever you go in the midst of a ribald world, for *it will often remind you of a precious truth*, “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Of course He does, if you do really love Him, for it is His own love in you returning whence it came, and He knows that it is there. If you do love Him, it was He who made you love Him. This plant of paradise never grows of its own accord in the dunghill of our nature, neither does it grow anywhere unless it is planted by the hand of God. He who gave you that love watches over it to bring it to perfection. Being a plant of His own right hand planting, He will water it every moment, and lest any hurt it, He will keep it night and day.

Having loved the Lord here on earth, you shall love Him by and by in heaven, where, with all the blood washed company, you shall find it the very heaven of your heaven to live forever, adoring Him whose eternal love, and sovereign grace, and almighty power have at last made you perfect, and brought you home, to love Him even as He loves you, according to your capacity.

II. There I must leave the text, so far as it specially concerns Peter, and come now to speak briefly upon the second part of the subject, which is, TO INVITE YOU TO EXAMINE YOURSELVES TO SEE WHETHER YOU CAN EACH GIVE THE SAME REPLY, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

First, *some say the same as Peter did, though they ought not to do so.* They say that they love Christ. "Yes, oh, yes, we love Him!" Let us talk to one of these glib speakers for a few moments. When did you begin to love the Lord? "Oh! I—I—I always did love Him." When were you converted, and renewed in heart? "Oh! I do not know that I ever was." Stop then, friend, before you say again that you love the Lord. Do you truly trust the Savior? Are you resting the whole weight of your soul upon Him? If you say, "No," then you do not love Him, for the only love which Christ will accept is born of faith. Love is the flower which grows out of the root of faith.

Perhaps you think that you are very good, and that you will probably get to heaven by your goodness. If that is your notion, then I am sure you do not really love Christ. You admire your beautiful self, you have been so good, and so excellent, that you do not want to be saved by the sinners' Savior. You want a special, particular Savior for you—a saint-Savior, not a sinner's Savior. Then I know you do not love the Christ of the Bible—the Christ of Calvary. You may love a sort of antichrist of your own inventing, but you do not love the Christ of God.

Let me ask you another question. You say that you love Christ, well then, for what do you thank Christ? "Well, I believe that there are some imperfections in me, and that Christ makes up for them." Do you? Then, in your esteem, He is only a makeweight, just to compensate for your deficiencies. His seamless robe of righteousness is to be torn to patch up your old rags! How many of you want to make Christ a kind of extra horse to drag the load up the hill? That is all you think of Him, but do you imagine that Christ and your poor team are to be joined together like that? Is it to be partly self-salvation, and partly salvation by Christ? If that is your idea, you insult the Savior—it may be unwittingly—that I am sure you cannot really love Him.

I have heard of a very excellent man—one of the holiest and best of men—who, when he lay dying, said, "Lord, when I estimate my works, I have to recollect that Your estimate is so very different from mine that I think it best to leave this business altogether, and trust my Savior only." I have heard of another who said, when he was dying, that he began to sort out his works, and some he thought were good, and some were bad, but after he had sorted them a little, he felt that the good ones were so very like the bad ones when he came really to look closely into them, that he pitched the whole lot overboard, and just trusted himself to Christ. That was a very wise and sensible thing to do, and I am sure that no man among you loves Christ unless he is trusting to Him only, and to Him wholly.

What is your view of Christ, dear friend! Is He your Master as well as your Savior? This is a question which I want to put very pointedly, for I heard a person ask the other day, "Is baptism essential to salvation?" Listen. This man means to do only that which is essential for his own salvation, that is all. To get into heaven, is all that he cares about, so he asks concerning one thing or another, "Is it essential to salvation?"

A soldier in her Majesty's army says, when an order is given to him, "Is this essential? Shall I be shot if I do not obey it?" Drum him out of the regiment, for what is the good of him? I look upon Christ as my Lord and Master, and if He bids me do something, though there may be in it nothing whatever to my profit, I am bound to do it because He is my Master and Lord. "Is it essential to salvation?" is a sneak's question, I dare not use a milder term.

I am often ashamed to answer those who make such an inquiry. The message to you is, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Did you come into the world merely that you might get saved? Is that all? Oh, poor, mean wretch! The Lord save you from being so selfish! How can you even get to heaven when your sole ambition is, somehow or other, to save your own skin? To get inside the pearly gates, and enjoy yourself—that is your notion of heaven, but that is the very thing from which you have to be saved.

I hope you will come to have quite another idea. I live not to save myself, but to glorify Him who has saved me. I work not because I hope to escape from hell by what I do, or to get to heaven by what I do, but because Christ has saved me, and now, out of gratitude to Him, if there is anything He wishes me to do, I do it without a question, saying to Him—

*“Hast Thou a lamb in all Thy flock
I would disdain to feed?
Hast Thou a foe, before whose face
I fear Thy cause to plead?”*

Get rid of selfishness, or else you cannot truthfully say that you love Christ, you are only loving yourself, and baptizing selfishness with the name of Christianity.

But next, I think that *there are some persons who ought to say what Peter did, and yet they are afraid to do so*. Some of the most beautiful, tender, loving, genuine, truehearted people in the world are, nevertheless, so timid, and so jealous of themselves, and they have such brokenness of spirit, that they dare not say that they love Christ, though I am sure that, if any people in the world do love Him, it is these poor people.

There are many who are so hard and harsh towards these dear tender, brokenhearted ones, that I like to cheer them all I can. I wish that they would grow stronger, I wish that they would become bolder, I wish they were braver, but then, I know that among these who dare not say publicly that they love Christ, are many who love Him vastly more than some who can talk very glibly about it.

I have told you before of the two friends who were shut up in prison, and one said to the other, “Oh, I do dread tomorrow morning! I am afraid that when I come to feel the fire, I shall recant. I know that I never was good at bearing pain, and I have heard that the pain of being burnt to death is very dreadful.” So the other turned round upon him and said, “I am ashamed of you talking like that, you know very well, it is for Christ’s cause that we are going to die. I am sure that I shall not have any such fear, I could bear a thousand deaths for Christ. I feel such courage in my spirit that I do not dread the pain, and I am ashamed that you do.”

They both came to be chained to the stake, and the boastful man recanted, and saved his skin, but the poor timid man stood bravely in the midst of the fire, and burned to death, and kept only saying, “Lord, help me! Lord, help me!” I believe that it often happens that those who are so trembling in themselves, are nevertheless, sound to the core, while many of your high flying gentlemen, who get perfect in about three minutes, and then begin to preach to those of us who have been, perhaps, thirty years in Christ, and tell us that we ought to be as perfect as they are—which we were before they were born—will be blown away like thistledown by the first wind that comes, and that the solid, weighty lumps of gold—these humble brokenhearted saints—will endure even to the end.

Still, dear brother, where are you? Mr. Despondency, I mean. I want you to say, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Where are you, Mrs. Much-afraid? I think I have read about you in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Mrs. Much-afraid, and Mr. Despondency, and Mr. Feeble-mind, and Mr. Ready-to-halt, who had the crutches, and went limping all his life, yet once upon a time, when Mr. Great-heart cut off Giant Despair’s head, and brought it to the pilgrims, they said that they would all dance, and Ready-to-halt danced on his crutches, and said that he hoped, by and by, to be where he should not be encumbered with them.

Come along, all you poor tried souls, let this be a time of rejoicing with you. Say in your spirit, if not in words, “Yes, Lord, we cannot hold back any longer, we must say it, ‘Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee.’” And when you have once said it, keep on saying it, my dear brother or sister, and the Lord keep you up to that blessed mark till, when the trumpet sounds in the morning, and you wake up in the endless day, you shall say, “Yes, Lord, I did love Thee, and I love Thee now, and I will love Thee for ever.” God grant that we may all say that, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

Before we go, let us sing this one verse—

*“I will love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death,
And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath;
And say, when the death-dew lies cold on my brow,
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.”*

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—711, 788, 639, 804

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ISAIAH 26:1-14

Verse 1. *In that day*—

Or rather, as we may read it now, “In this day”—

1-3. *Shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.*

Here is the song which we are to sing in this Gospel day. The theme of it is God, and the city which He has builded, and which He has given to us to be our heritage forever. “We have a strong city,” yes, beloved, a very strong one, for although the devil has exercised all his ingenuity for these thousands of years, he has not been able to destroy it. He has thrown in the bombshell of persecution, he has tried to undermine it with his subtlety and cunning of false doctrine, but he has not been able to do anything effectually against the strong city yet. “We have a strong city,” and she is just as strong now, after all the desperate attacks that have been made upon her walls, as ever she was. Against her, the gates of hell cannot prevail. The church of Christ is never in danger. “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.”

After noticing the security of the city, the prophet bids us “open the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.” It is the Gospel minister’s business to seek to open the gates, it is the Christian’s business, in some sense, to open the gates, yes, we should all of us be endeavoring, if possible, to “open the gates, that the righteous nation”—that is, the righteous people “may enter” into the church. But after all, the Lord Jesus Christ is the great Opener of the gates, He opens the gates to let His people in. And mark you, they do not all come in at one gate.

The command is, “Open ye the *gates*.” Some come in by means of one doctrine, and some by means of another. We are not all converted by the same agency. Some come in at the Sunday school gate, others come in at the gate which is kept by pious parents, many come in at the gate of the preached Word, but all the gates should be open, “Open ye the *gates*, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.”

The prophet next describes the peaceableness of this city. The gates are open, but no enemy ever enters in, for he says to the Lord, “Thou wilt keep Him in peace—peace,” as the original has it, in double peace. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.” There is nothing like staying the mind on God. If you stay the mind on anything else, you cannot have perfect peace, for that something else may fail you. If you trust in horses and in chariots, horses may tire, and the wheels of the chariots may break, but he who trusteth in the Lord shall dwell “in perfect peace.” Let the earth be all in arms abroad, the believer dwells “in perfect peace,” “because he trusteth in thee.”

4-5. *Trust you in the Lord for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength: for he bringeth down them that dwell on high;*

Some of you dwell so much “on high” that you do not believe the doctrine of original depravity; you are very good by nature, according to your own ideas. Well, remember this declaration of the prophet,

"He bringeth down them that dwell on high." Others of you boast of your free will capacity, and you think you have power to do anything outside the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Ah! but "He bringeth down them that dwell on high." Others of you do not know what a doubt or a fear is, but you wrap yourselves up complacently in your self-sufficiency, and say, "We are secure." Ah! but "He bringeth down them that dwell on high."

5. *The lofty city, he layeth it low;*

No one can lay God's city low, but God can lay the lofty city low.

5-7. *He layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy. The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.*

God "weighs the path of the just" in scales. We read elsewhere that God weighs the spirits, and weighs our actions, here we are told that He "weighs the path of the just." Those words, which were used by the prophet when he went to Hezekiah and said, "What have they seen in thine house?" would serve for a very striking text. But it is still more important to consider what God has seen in our house and in our hearts, for God weighs our actions, He weighs our private thoughts and our public deeds; He "weighs the path of the just."

But according to the prophet, "the way of the just is uprightness," even after it is weighed. Notwithstanding all the sin that is mixed with it, in the main it is "uprightness" ascending towards God.

8-9. *Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

Alas! it is often the case that, when God's "judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" for a little while and then forget it. All too often, they are like the child who merely learns his lesson by rote, and repeats it under the fear of the rod, and then forgets all about it on the morrow. They "learn righteousness," but soon, the effect of the warning is all gone, and then God sends fresh judgments upon the earth to teach the inhabitants further lessons.

10-12. *Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD. LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them. LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.*

Troubled saint, what a precious passage this is for you! Poor, tempest tossed soul, what a glorious utterance! "LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us." There shall come an ordinance from God, that His people shall have peace, "Thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us," so they must be good works, but those works which God did not work in us are bad ones.

13-14. *O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise:*

Many of us can look back to the time when we made idols of business and of worldly things, but now these lords are dead, and they shall not live again, they are buried out of our sight, and they shall not rise from their graves.

14. *Therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.*

And a blessed thing it is when the memory of our sins does perish, and we have no desire to be enslaved by them again.